

As I travel around the First District of Virginia, I frequently encounter individuals who serve or have served our nation in some capacity. Our area truly has one of the largest concentrations of veterans in the nation, and I am proud to represent such a fantastic group of devoted, patriotic Americans for whom service has always ranked above self. We owe them so much, and yet one of the most egregious examples of government inefficiency is the abysmal claims backup at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I am fully committed to ensuring that our nation's veterans receive the benefits that they have earned, and I have cosponsored several bills to improve the VA claims process, including the Putting Veterans Funding First Act (H.R. 813) and the Veterans Timely Access to Health Care Act (H.R. 241). I also joined many of my colleagues in May in sending a letter to the president urging him to take direct action to reduce the VA claims backlog. Most recently, I urged VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to consider a partnership with pro bono law school veterans benefit clinics nationwide that provide assistance to veterans mired in the claims process. William and Mary Law School's Lewis B. Puller, Jr. Veterans Benefits Clinic, and its associated Helping Military Veterans through Higher Education Consortium, has exemplified the way innovative methods can improve this process, with legal experts helping our veterans navigate the claims system, whether through compiling necessary documentation, submitting complex claim forms, or even coordinating medical evaluations. Without this assistance, these veterans would simply be at the mercy of an ineffective, tangled system. William and Mary's program should serve as a national template for improving the VA claims process and helping our veterans. By creating a formal partnership between the VA and these pro bono clinics, Secretary Shinseki would allow our veterans more effective representation and assistance. The service and sacrifice of these exemplary citizens deserve better treatment than the status quo.

At the same time, it's critical that our newer veterans have the tools and skills that they need to transfer into civilian life. Earlier this year, I cosponsored the Troop Talent Act, a bill that helps translate military skills into civilian credentialing and that was later incorporated into National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 1960), which passed the House of Representatives on June 14. I am also a cosponsor of the Veteran Emergency Medical Technician Support Act (H.R. 235), which helps to fill the shortage of EMT's by streamlining the EMT certification and licensure process for veterans who have already completed military EMT training during their military service. The families of our veterans and active duty servicemembers also deserve the absolute best treatment we can provide, and I was proud to join my colleague Rep. Matt Cartwright from Pennsylvania in introducing the Military Spouse Job Continuity Act (H.R. 1620), which would help ease transitions for military families by offering a tax credit to any military spouse who must renew or transfer a professional license due to a military Change of Station order. The families of our servicemen and women bravely share in the sacrifice that their loved ones make, and I will work to honor their commitment to this nation.

As August continues, I urge my colleagues in Washington to return to Washington address the many issues important to our citizens and to our nation. The main streets of Virginia's First District are full of ideas to get our economy back on track, and your feedback is critically important to me as I serve you. I can be reached by telephone at (202) 225-4261, through my website (www.wittman.house.gov), on Facebook (www.facebook.com/reprobwittman), and via Twitter (www.twitter.com/robwittman).

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He serves on the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Armed Services Committee where he is the Chairman of the Readiness Subcommittee.

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